

May 2019

A COR's Guide to Responsibilities and Roles of PMs, PjMs, CORs, & COs

This *Quick Reference Guide* reviews common definitions, roles, and responsibilities of the major actors in the acquisition process: program manager (PM), project manager (PjM), contracting officer's representative (COR), and contracting officer (CO). As a practical matter, there may be some purposeful and expected overlap in some roles and responsibilities while others are unique to a specific role.

Why is terminology important?

In the acquisition process, a common lexicon is critical to success. For example, having a common understanding of the term "best value" in acquisition ensures integrity in the use of the term. This is also true for understanding program and project management in the context of acquisition.

The Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) notes that acquisition encompasses ...

... the conceptualization, initiation, design, development, testing, contracting, production, deployment, logistics support, modification, and disposal of systems, supplies, or services (including construction) to satisfy formal agency needs. Acquisitions result from investment decisions, respond to approved requirements, align to strategic direction, and are guided by approved baselines.

Some agencies may have different understandings of terminology than those contained in this publication. For example, an agency may define and scope functions in a different manner that is nevertheless consistent with agency policy. That being said, this *Quick Reference Guide* uses common terms and explanations widely accepted within the discipline of program and project management from the Project Management Institute (PMI), Federal Acquisition Institute (FAI), Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and Department of Defense (DoD).

Definitions

To set the common framework, a good starting point is an exploration of the definitions and differences between

a program and a project. While they share similar descriptors, they also have differentiators, both of which can impact the roles and responsibilities of PMs and PjMs.

What is a Program?

The Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) does not define program or project. However, there are several widely used definitions of programs. We've selected four of them.

1. **PMI:**
A program is a group of related projects managed in a coordinated way to obtain benefits and control not available from managing them individually.
2. **FAI's [Project Manager's Guidebook](#) uses OFPP's definition:**
Directed, funded acquisitions that provide new, improved, or continuing systems or services in response to an approved need. Programs are divided into levels established to facilitate decision-making, execution, and compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements and may be composed of multiple projects, services contracts, interagency agreements, and other types of acquisitions. With a systems or services capability focus, programs usually tie together an agency's higher-level programming and budgeting process with the agency's strategic plan.
3. **OMB:**
[M]ission, functions, projects, activities, laws, rules and regulations which an agency is authorized and funded by statute to administer and enforce. The focus of a program may be on providing products and services to the public, [s]tate and local government, private industry, foreign governments or [f]ederal agencies. Additionally, a program may be professional, scientific, technical, administrative, or fiscal in nature. Typically, programs involve broad objectives, including national defense; law enforcement; public health, safety and well-being; collection of revenue; regulation of trade; collection and dissemination of information; and the delivery of benefits or services. However, specialized or staff programs may be considerably narrower in scope (e.g., merit systems protection; nuclear safety; and agency-wide personnel or budget programs). Programs are usually of such a magnitude that

they must be carried out through a combination of mission and mission-support functions.

4. DoD's [Directive 5000.01](#):
A directed, funded effort that provides a new, improved, or continuing materiel, weapon or information system, or service capability in response to an approved need.

What is a Project?

As with program, there are several well-recognized definitions of "project" relevant to federal acquisition. In reviewing these definitions, note the similarities and differences to the "program" definitions.

1. PMI:
A project is **temporary** in that it has a defined beginning and end in time, and therefore defined scope and resources.
And a **project** is unique in that it is not a routine operation, but a specific set of operations designed to accomplish a singular goal. ... (*emphasis in original*)
2. FAI shares some common language with PMI:
A planned acquisition undertaking with a definite beginning and clear termination point that produces a defined capability. A project is an individually planned, approved, and managed basic building block related to a program. A project is not constrained to any specific element of the budget structure; however, basic research, maintenance of equipment and facilities, and operations are not considered projects.
3. OMB:
A temporary endeavor to create a unique product or service with a start date, a completion date, and a defined scope. Projects are executed in a manner to improve the efficient and effective implementation of a program.
4. DoD's definition from the Defense Acquisition University (DAU) [Glossary](#)*:
1) Synonymous with program in general usage. 2) Specifically, a planned undertaking having a finite beginning and ending, involving definition, development, production, and Logistics Support (LS) of a major weapon or weapon support system or systems. A project may be the whole or a part of a program.

Program management is about maximizing the benefits realized with constrained resources in a changing environment.
Project management is focused on the efficient creation of a defined deliverable.

Source: [PMI](#)

Image© 2011 TheNewPhobia

?WHAT do you THINK?



How do these definitions compare?

As we examine these program and project definitions, a common theme is apparent: **Programs are generally considered larger scale and may have projects within them. Projects typically have a short, defined duration.** Programs may continue for a long period of time. Notwithstanding the similar and unique characteristics of each, note that programs and projects may exist absent the other.

What are common roles and responsibilities of the PM?

The PM focuses on the overall strategic and sometimes operational aspects of a program. Fundamental to this focus is the responsibility to ensure program efforts will result in successful performance and completion of the acquisition on time and within budget. Inherent in this responsibility is the need to assess and manage risk across the program.

A program charter should identify the PM and define resources available to him/her along with the breadth of responsibilities. If the program has underlying projects, the PM is responsible for ensuring the projects align and meet the overall program objectives. The PM may accomplish this through the support of subordinate PjMs or bear the sole responsibility for projects within the program.

Consider an acquisition for the manufacture and delivery of a fleet of trucks to replace an aging fleet. The requirement includes trucks and support equipment, technical data, training, maintenance, repair, and spare parts. The trucks' capability is heavily reliant on software systems that must be compatible with a common, in-use

logistics software system for land vehicles that may require upgrades.

The program goal is capability throughout the intended life cycle, dependent on several discrete but interrelated projects, e.g., maintenance, support equipment, spare parts, and software. Due to the large scope of this program, projects are separately managed and reported to the program level. All projects contribute to the program goal.

Note that this example refers to replacement of an aging fleet. The program — and projects — must work together to align the phase out of the existing fleet with the phase in of the new.

The PM must have solid critical thinking skills and the ability to manage multiple dimensions of the program. The target result is sound and supportable decisions on a program that exists in a dynamic acquisition environment.

The PM is not expected to be a functional expert in all disciplines. Access to the necessary functional expertise that enables the PM to assess risks and make decisions is critical.

While the FAR is silent on defining PM, there are widely accepted definitions of the PM's roles and responsibilities. Words may differ but spirit and intent are the same. FAI's Project Management Guidebook defines the PM as:

The acquisition workforce member with the responsibility and relevant discretionary authority who is uniquely empowered to make final scope-of-work, capital investment, and performance acceptability decisions on assigned acquisition programs. The program manager is also responsible for meeting program objectives or production requirements through the acquisition of any mix of in-house, contract, or reimbursable support resources. Program managers are responsible to stakeholders for management and oversight of subordinate projects within the scope of the overall program. *The program manager is ultimately responsible for effectively managing all business and technical risks of the program to ensure effective systems and services are delivered to the end user on schedule, within budget, and at the required levels of performance. (emphasis added)*

We see in this definition a reinforcement of the PM's responsibility for management and oversight of subordinate projects, which are part of the program. Note the specific functional areas; i.e., managing all business and technical risks of the program. And, importantly, the

Figure 1: The Relationship of Acquisition Constraints



reference to performance, budget, and schedule serve as a reminder of the balancing act the PM must perform. DoD's definition of the PM is similar to FAI's (note the word *credible*):

Designated individual with responsibility for and authority to accomplish program objectives for development, production, and sustainment to meet the user's operational needs. The PM shall be accountable for credible cost, schedule, and performance reporting to the [Milestone Decision Authority]. (DoDD 5000.01)

- Consistent with FAI, PMI states:
The person authorized by the performing organization to lead the team or teams responsible for achieving program objectives.
- OFPP provides this definition, essentially the same as FAI's:
... the acquisition workforce member with the responsibility, and relevant discretionary authority, who is uniquely empowered to make final scope-of-work, [capital investment], and performance acceptability decisions on assigned acquisition programs. The program manager is also responsible for meeting program objectives or production requirements through the acquisition of any mix of in-house, contract, or reimbursable support resources. Program managers are responsible to stakeholders for management and oversight of subordinate projects within the scope of the overall program, as well IPTs. The program manager is ultimately

Quick Reference Guide

responsible for effectively managing all business and technical risks of the program to insure effective systems and services are delivered to the end user on schedule, within budget and at the required levels of performance.

Bad news isn't wine. It doesn't get better with age.
– Colin Powell

Figure 1 (on page 3) depicts the interrelationship among the triple constraints. The PM must manage the program to cost, performance, and schedule, which requires constant attention to all aspects of the program and awareness of the likelihood or realization of any of the three being out of alignment.

?WHATif

It's Monday morning and the government PM gets a phone call from the contractor's PM. "We have a problem. Four of our programmers have job offers from Google. These are the senior programmers who wrote the code for this classified task. To keep them, I have to increase their annual wages by 35 percent each year over the next four years of this contract. As you know, it's a cost-plus-fixed-fee contract and this will result in additional costs. If I let them go we have significant schedule slip. If I keep them costs increase. "Government PM, over to you."

Widely accepted definitions have the PM overseeing multiple projects that are managed by individual PjMs.

What are common roles and responsibilities of the PjM?

The FAI Project Management Guidebook defines the PjM as:

The acquisition workforce member *assigned responsibility* for accomplishing a specifically designated work effort or group of closely related efforts established to *achieve stated or designated objectives*, defined tasks, or other units of related acquisition effort on a *schedule*, within

cost constraints, and in support of the program mission or objective. The project manager is responsible for the planning, controlling, and reporting of the project and for the management of required functions, including acquisition planning, definitization of requirements, business case development, performance of the schedule, and formulation, justification, and execution of the budget. The project manager is responsible for effectively managing project *risks* to ensure effective systems and services are delivered through a total life-cycle approach to the end user on *schedule*, within *budget* and at the required levels of *performance*. A program manager may also serve as project manager for projects within the scope of the program. (*emphasis added*)

The italicized words in that definition indicate common language between the PM and PjM definitions. Note that the triple constraints depicted in Figure 1 are specifically indicated in each definition. The explicit reference to cost, schedule, performance, and risk underscore the important role the PjM plays in managing a project to achieve a successful acquisition outcome.

And a final note of importance: The last sentence of the FAI definition harmonizes the responsibilities of the PM to those of the PjM, given an explicit delegation of those responsibilities.

- The DAU Glossary* refers to the definition of PM for the PjM definition:
Designated individual with responsibility for and authority to accomplish program objectives for development, production, and sustainment to meet the user's operational needs. The PM shall be accountable for credible cost, schedule, and performance reporting to the Milestone Decision Authority (MDA).
- PMI offers this definition. Note that two words differentiate the PjM from the PM: PMs are *authorized* and PjMs are *assigned*. One might conclude that the spirit and intent remain the same:
The person assigned by the performing organization to lead the team that is responsible for achieving the project objectives.
- OMB provides this definition of the roles and responsibilities of the PjM, again essentially the same as FAI's:
... the acquisition workforce member assigned responsibility for accomplishing a specifically designated work effort or group of closely related efforts established to achieve stated or designated objectives, defined tasks, or other units of related effort on a schedule, within cost constraints and in support of the program mission or objective. The project manager is responsible for the planning, controlling, and reporting of the project, and for the management of required functions, including acquisition planning, definitization of requirements, business case development, performance of the schedule, and for-

mulation, justification and execution of the budget. The project manager is responsible for effectively managing project risks to insure effective systems and services are delivered through a total lifecycle approach to the end user on schedule, within budget and at the required levels of performance. *A program manager may also serve as project manager for projects within the scope of the program. (emphasis added)*

?INpractice

What's in a name?

Different taxonomies exist for PMs and PjMs; "textbook" definitions offer a lens with which to examine the similarities and differences between the two. Agencies may use PM to define what others may define as a PjM or vice versa. Or, the PM may also be a PjM. What really matters is a clear and common understanding of your roles and responsibilities.

What overarching responsibilities exist for both the PM and PjM?

Throughout the acquisition process, the PM and PjM play major roles in guiding and shaping the inputs, processes, and outputs. Each may lead acquisition planning and serve as the focal point, liaising with requirements personnel and end users. These responsibilities are important front-end activities because the quality of the planning and clear definition of requirements will ultimately impact the acquisition's outcome.

!TIP

FAR 7.101 is a great resource to ensure fundamental program/project aspects are considered up front and early.

Both roles must have good situational awareness of the external and internal operating environments that can impact the acquisition effort. The right resources must be available that will inform supportable data-driven decisions at the project and program levels.

The extent of the PM/PjM's involvement during the life cycle of an acquisition will depend on the delegation of responsibilities. A PM or PjM may receive a COR delegation. In some agencies, the COR delegation may occur at program/project initiation (presolicitation phase), thus suggesting the COR may de facto serve as the PM or PjM.

In examining the framework for program and project management, note that in the operational context of acquisition the PM/PjM may be one person with a single

delegation, different people with separate and distinct delegations, or standalone functions (e.g., a PM and no PjM). How agencies source these responsibilities is dependent on their level of resources, policies, and other guidelines. It's important to understand how your agency establishes roles and responsibilities and how they are distributed among the actors throughout the acquisition life cycle.

What are common roles and responsibilities of the COR?

The COR is responsible for technical monitoring or administration of a contract. While a PM or PjM may be designated as a COR, the COR may be another member of the program office, requiring activity, or contract administration activity. For example, a COR delegation may be made after contract award with continued PM/PjM involvement. An advantage of this approach is that the PM/PjM remains aware of both technical and contractual matters that may impact a follow-on or related contract. However, the scope of responsibilities must be clear to ensure any overlap is purposeful and beneficial. On the other hand, if a gap in responsibilities is identified, it must be reconciled.

All contracts do not require a COR; for example, a firm-fixed-price contract for supplies may not benefit from a COR delegation. When a COR is needed, he/she is nominated either by the requiring activity or in accordance with agency procedures and designated in writing by the CO. The CO sets forth the COR's specific responsibilities in an appointment letter.

- **FAR 2.101** provides this COR definition:
 - ... an individual, including a contracting officer's technical representative (COTR), designated and authorized in writing by the contracting officer to perform specific technical or administrative functions.
- **DoD PGI 201.6-1** states:
 - A COR assists in the technical monitoring or administration of a contract.

COR responsibilities normally lie within the scope of the post-award phase. However, a distinct advantage of the COR's participation in pre-award activities is the opportunity to become familiar with all aspects of the acquisition. This pays dividends in the award and post-award phases.

The DoD **COR Handbook** contains 194 pages that address all aspects of the COR's post-award roles and

Quick Reference Guide

responsibilities. Table 1 lists typical COR post-award responsibilities as delineated in the handbook. The list is not all-inclusive, but representative of important areas of focus. (Note: This is the 2012 edition. We recommend you check for updates.)

Table 1: Typical COR Post-Award Responsibilities

| | |
|--|--|
| Understanding the contract | Handling unsatisfactory performance |
| Keeping files current and complete | Tracking modifications |
| Correspondence and responses - With the contractor - Notifications to the CO | Monitoring contract performance: training, travel, government-furnished property, personnel, labor |
| Conclude appointment/designation appropriately | Technical expertise |
| Inspection and acceptance or rejection of deliverables | Understanding COR limitations |
| Treatment of proprietary and/or classified information | Protecting sensitive or government information |
| Managing problems | Related duties |

The COR and CO must work together throughout the post-award phase to ensure performance requirements are satisfied within the terms and conditions of the contract, and on time and within budget. Using a tracking tool, providing regular updates, and ongoing discussion of issues — not only between the COR and CO but also with the PM, PjM, and contractor — makes sense and can help avoid problems.

What are common roles and responsibilities of the CO?

FAR 2.101 defines a CO as:

... a person with the authority to enter into, administer, and/or terminate contracts and make related determinations and findings. The term includes certain authorized representatives of the contracting officer acting within the limits of their authority as delegated by the contracting officer. "Administrative contracting officer (ACO)" refers to a contracting officer who is administering contracts. "Termination contracting officer (TCO)" refers to a contracting officer who is settling terminated contracts. A single contracting officer may be responsible for duties in any or all of these areas.

The CO has the exclusive authority to:

- Enter into a contract
- Make contract modifications
- Make related determinations and findings
- Issue a final decision on any contractor claim
- Terminate a contract

The CO is the linchpin that keeps the entire contracting process intact, transparent, ethical, and consistent with applicable law, regulation, and policy. The CO must ensure alignment and collaboration among members of the acquisition team and practice good situational awareness, good judgment, and supportable decision-making in all phases of the contract in keeping with his/her important fiduciary responsibility. The contract is the legally binding instrument between the contractor and the government that will support accomplishment of an agency's mission. For this reason, the CO bears a significant weight of responsibility during the entire acquisition process.

How do the roles and responsibilities of the PM, PjM, COR, and CO harmonize during the acquisition process?

Examining roles and responsibilities of these important actors within each of the major phases of the acquisition process is a reminder of the importance of collaboration and a well-coordinated effort. Table 2 (on page 8) provides a snapshot of some major inputs of each actor during each acquisition phase. The contributions are not all-inclusive and may vary depending on the breadth and depth of roles and responsibilities defined by the agency.

Note the areas of possible overlap in major contributions, which suggests an opportunity to collaborate. Overlap must be intentional and purposefully managed. Inadvertent overlap of responsibilities will create contract chaos. When overlap exists, determine the hierarchy of decision making.

A void indicates an area for which there is no contributor or "action officer." Be alert to these areas. For example, the absence of a PM or PjM on the program/project might be mitigated by addressing PM/PjM responsibilities in the scope of a COR delegation.

Key takeaways

- The roles and responsibilities of the PM, PjM, COR, and CO are separate yet interrelated. Each makes an important contribution to the success of the acquisition. Note that absent a PM, a PjM typically performs the same functions. Otherwise, the PjM supports the PM by managing the assigned project(s) that fall under the program umbrella.
- Understanding the depth and breadth of PM and PjM responsibilities and how they help shape and influence a positive outcome informs not only a holistic view but offers an additional and more narrow lens with which to view the details of those responsibilities.

- A void or overlap in roles and responsibilities can have a detrimental impact on the acquisition outcome. Look for such indicators and resolve them early.
 - COR delegations must have clarity of process and purpose.
 - Certain contract actions remain the exclusive responsibility of the CO.
 - All contributors must have the requisite knowledge and skill set to successfully perform their responsibilities.
 - Be aware of your agency's policies, definitions, and use of program and project management. ♦
- * Note: Our research does not indicate an official DoD definition of project; thus the DAU definition is noted.*

See page 8 for a table on major inputs of the PM, PJM, COR, and CO roles during each acquisition phase.

VAO Resources

- Advisory: [The Project Manager's Pre-Award Contracting Playbook](#)
- Inquiry responses:
 - [Where are CORs typically organizationally located within an agency?](#)
 - [How does a federal government agency determine the number of CORs and PMs needed to support their program portfolio?](#)
- [COR Toolkit](#)

This *Quick Reference Guide* is published as part of the Virtual Acquisition Office™ subscription service, www.GoToVAO.com. Information and opinions are based on best available information, but their accuracy and completeness cannot be guaranteed. VAO recommends consulting the relevant sections of your agency's FAR supplement and policies for amplifying details and guidance.

Contents ©2019 by the Virtual Acquisition Office™. All rights reserved.

Table 2: Acquisition Phases, Contributors, and Major Contributions

| ACQUISITION PHASE | CONTRIBUTOR | MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS |
|-------------------|-------------|---|
| Pre-Award | PM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with customers/end users to define requirements • Ensure availability of funds • Conduct market research • Contribute to, draft, and be a signatory to the acquisition plan • Contribute to the source selection plan • Collaborate on sourcing methodology • Assist in answering preproposal questions • Participate as a member of the source selection team if designated |
| | PjM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the PM in performing duties as assigned • Perform PM contributions if no PM role exists • Participate as a member of the source selection team if designated |
| | COR | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perform PM or PjM contributions if no such roles exist • Collaborate on PM and/or PjM contributions • Develop a quality assurance surveillance plan (QASP) • Participate as a member of the source selection team if designated |
| | CO | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate with PM, PjM, and COR • Lead precontractual matters, including necessary legal reviews • Contribute to and be a signatory to the acquisition plan • Develop the source selection plan • Develop and issue the solicitation • Serve as a source selection team member and/or authority • Establish competitive range • Conduct discussions |
| Award | PM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the CO • Continue performance of any ongoing program management responsibilities |
| | PjM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the PM in performing duties as assigned • Continue performance of any ongoing project management responsibilities |
| | COR | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the CO • Perform PM or PjM contributions if no such roles exist • Continue or begin delegated COR responsibilities |
| | CO | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notify unsuccessful offerors • Make award announcement • Sign the contract • Conduct debriefings • Appoint the COR, assign specific responsibilities |
| Post-Award | PM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the CO • Coordinate with designated COR • Continue performance of any ongoing program management responsibilities |
| | PjM | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the PM in performing duties as assigned • Perform PM contributions if no such role exists |
| | COR | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage to the QASP and other surveillance requirements • Perform technical and administrative oversight of the contract • Maintain close liaison with the CO, PM, PjM, and contractor • Perform PM or PjM contributions if no such roles exist • Recommend and/or provide advice on contract modifications and changes • Provide input to the CO on contractor requests for equitable adjustment and claims • Provide input to contractor performance evaluation(s) |
| | CO | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct ongoing administration of the contract • Execute modifications and changes, negotiate as required • Resolve contractor disagreements, claims, and disputes |